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PRESENTATION  
OF THE  
ROYAL AWARDS

TO CAPTAIN SPEKE, THE DISCOVERER OF LAKE NYANZA; AND  
MR. MACDOUALL STUART, THE EXPLORER OF CENTRAL  
AUSTRALIA.

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AT a previous anniversary it was made known by the Council that in awarding one of our Gold Medals to Captain Burton for his various adventurous explorations, we also fully recognised the high merits of his coadjutor Captain Speke, not only for his geographical labours in laying down their joint map, but also for his independent discovery of the Lake Nyanza Victoria. Had not the Council then desired to divide its honours between the leaders of discoveries in Africa on the one hand, and in North America on the other, there can be no doubt that Burton and Speke would have been simultaneously honoured.

As it is, however, we now have it in our power to give to Captain Speke precisely the same honour which was conferred last year on Captain Burton. Our satisfaction in doing this is increased by knowing that the man we now honour is at this moment employed by the Royal Geographical Society, assisted by Her Majesty's Government, in one of the most arduous enterprizes which was ever contemplated. For if Captain Speke, with his gallant associate Captain Grant, should succeed in defining the whole of the Lake Nyanza, and should be able so to pass northwards as to join Consul Petherick on that southernmost portion of the White Nile, up to which boats and canoes can transport provisions from the north, then truly he will have laid open a vast portion of the interior of Africa hitherto entirely unknown. Whether, indeed, he may be able to determine (even with the aid of the bold and successful Petherick) what may be truly the remotest source of the White Nile, is very problematical. For the Lake Victoria Nyanza, along the banks of which he will proceed, must doubtless be fed by affluents, some of the most powerful of which may descend from the lofty chain of Kenia and Doengo-Engai on the east, and others from the so-called Mountains of the Moon on the south-west.

In this point of view, many a year may elapse before the geographer will be able to trace to its spring-head the largest of these countless affluents. But looking to the White Nile as a gigantic stream which flows directly from south to north, and is subtended and barred in by flanking chains, it will be a sufficient triumph for this our expedition, if Speke can but prove to us, as he has indeed suggested, that his Lake Nyanza Victoria does so range from south to north as to be in direct communication with, and in the same meridian as the Upper White Nile, into which it is supposed the stream descends by cataracts from the water-parting near the Equator, through the Nyanza Victoria.

If Captain Speke should work out this important feature of the mission we have confided to him, he will assuredly reap a scientific glory from his exploits at the sources of the Nile, and thus be entitled to share the honour of the anagram applied to the illustrious Nelson after his victory at the mouth of that classic stream,—

“Honor est a Nilo!”

Sir Roderick Murchison then addressed Earl de Grey in these words:—

“My LORD,—I have naturally great pleasure in requesting your Lordship, who sat in this chair so recently, and who now occupy so distinguished a post in the government of India, to receive this our Founder’s Medal for Captain Speke, a gallant officer of the Indian army.

“As you are quite familiar with the merits of Captain Speke, and are acquainted with the undaunted zeal with which he and his brother officer, Captain Grant, also of the Indian Service, are now endeavouring to trace the sources of the Nile, your approval of their labours will assuredly be most grateful to the feelings of these explorers and their relatives at home.”

“I will not ask you to transmit this medal to Captain Speke; for although an Anglo-Indian army did once pass through Lower Egypt, I apprehend that, even the colossal power of the Administration of which you form a part, might fail in catching our Medallist on his way to his lake Nyanza Victoria; but I request you to convey to the parents of the absent traveller this token of our good will and regard for what he has already accomplished, with the expression of our earnest hope that he may be entirely successful in his present noble endeavour.”

Earl de Grey replied by expressing the very great pleasure he experienced in accepting, on behalf of Captain Speke, that symbol of the high estimation in which the Royal Geographical Society held the services he had rendered, and was still rendering, to geo-

graphical science. He cordially and entirely concurred in the course which the Society had taken in awarding that medal to Captain Speke. As President of the Society last year, he had the gratification of presenting a similar medal to Captain Burton, also an officer in the Indian army; and connected as he (Earl de Grey) now was with the Indian-office, it was a source of pleasure to him to think that officers of the old Indian army were amalgamating with the rest of the service without yielding any portion of the honourable heritage which, as travellers and geographers, seemed to be pre-eminently their own.

The Chairman then continued : The Patron's Medal has been adjudicated, as you have just heard, to Mr. MacDouall Stuart, for his great and successful explorations in the interior of Australia. When we reflect upon the many endeavours which have been made to traverse the interior of this vast continent, and the partial successes only which have attended the efforts of the most justly distinguished of those explorers, we must at once admit that never was our Gold Medal more worthily bestowed than on this occasion. Of all the precursors of Stuart, the champion in this field of toil and adventure has been Sturt; for even in the year 1837 that distinguished topographer, proceeding from the south to the north-west, reached s. lat.  $24^{\circ} 30'$ , e. long.  $137^{\circ} 59'$ . Then it was that, when arrested by arid, saline wastes, in which no drop of fresh water could be detected, Sturt taught one of his subordinates, whilst braving such difficulties, and during such perilous and exhausting journeys, to lay down the precise geographical position of every mountain, valley, or river, and to mark the exact width of every desert tract of "scrub" that separates those oases from each other which are fertilized by fresh-water springs.

As the surveying officer thus instructed was our Medallist of this day, who has now surpassed his old chief (by reaching s. lat.  $18^{\circ} 46'$  and e. long.  $135^{\circ} 52'$ , or 447 English miles farther to the north-west), let us, in honouring the last prizeman, never cease to recollect that, unless there had been a Sturt, to whom we formerly also gave our medal, there might not for many a day have arisen a MacDouall Stuart! It is thus that the value of our honours is recognised, and that, acting up to the motto "Præmiando incitat," we increase and score up the new triumphs of advancing knowledge.

From his previous surveys, then, our Medallist had satisfied himself that in the easterly meridian on which Sturt had endeavoured to proceed from the south, all his efforts would be fruitless. We know not if he had then formed the opinion, that to the west of his former

exploration there existed a great depression, which, extending northwards from Lake Torrens, constituted a saline band of some breadth; but we do know that his last discoveries have proved the existence of such an interior depression. Well aware, from the previous labours of Eyre, that the south-western coast-lands constituted an intensely saline region, and, from the actual efforts of Babbage, Warburton, and others, that the environs of Lake Torrens were also intensely saline, the lightly-equipped Stuart darted off to the north-west, and there discovered that fine range of well-watered hills which were alluded to at our last Anniversary. Subsequently indeed he demonstrated—what has not been dwelt upon except at a recent evening meeting—that the rivers proceeding from those hills of small elevation flow into the north and south depression above alluded to, and, becoming saline near their mouths, terminate in an extensive salt-water lake. With our present knowledge, therefore, we may infer that Stuart has fixed the western boundary of a low saline desert, on the eastern shores of which Sturt was arrested. Whether this desert may or not be found to extend much farther to the north, or whether it may be connected with the saliferous sandy tracts reached by Gregory in his efforts to penetrate southwards from the tropical region of northern Victoria, can alone be determined by future explorers. As far as exploration has gone there seems good grounds for believing, with Colonel Gawler, that there may be a vast region of interior lands to the west and north-west which may at some future day be occupied by our colonists.

In the meantime what a noble and successful effort has not MacDouall Stuart made to reach the northern coast—for he was within 245 English miles of the Gulf of Carpentaria—and how sincerely have we to thank him for having laid down his devious path so accurately on a map! No one, however, who has not completely read his diary can duly form an idea of the difficulties Stuart had to contend with, and of the invincible fortitude, talent, and sagacity with which he traversed the numerous intervening breadths of scrub and desert to reach a water-hole. Many of the tracts around these springs will doubtless at no distant period be centres of the sheep and cattle pastures of our colonists. And if some of the largest and best of these tracts should fall to the lot of the individuals who originally furnished MacDouall Stuart with the funds and appliances to make these discoveries, let us say that Messrs. Chambers and Finke are richly deserving of that recompense. These gentlemen must indeed be viewed by us as the persons

without whose energy and well-employed capital we should not now have been recounting one of the most striking geographical exploits of modern times.

Having already penetrated to the water-parting of Central and Northern Australia, or where the rivers flow either north-eastwards to the Gulf of Carpentaria, or north-westwards into Cambridge Gulf, MacDouall Stuart may be said to have all but traversed the entire continent from north to south. His present effort to complete that traverse will, we anticipate, be crowned with entire success; and we trust that he may already have reached that fertile tract at the mouth of the Victoria where Gregory's expedition was so long encamped. We are indeed informed by Mr. Chambers that MacDouall Stuart left Chambers' Creek on the 31st January, his party consisting of about 50 horses, with 8 men, and a second in command. He was provisioned for three months, and is to form a dépôt at Bonny's Creek, and, if possible, to strike the Victoria with a small party.

And here I cannot but regret that the suggestions offered by myself, in more than one Anniversary Discourse addressed to this Society, have not hitherto been followed up by any endeavours to form settlements on the north coast of Australia, wherein our fleets might find harbours of refuge, and where, in case of war, our armed forces would occupy a position flanking the whole of that Indian Archipelago in which Britain possesses such rich, vested interests. Had we already one such settlement only, and had thus substantially claimed as our own the northern shore of a continent of which we already occupy the other sides, then truly should we have rejoiced in the prospect that, whilst I now address you, our Medallist had reached a haven of repose. But, even as it is, no great gift of seerdom is required to prophesy that the mere passage to the north coast which has been effected by MacDouall Stuart will not only cause the occupation of the intermediate country, but will soon lead to the formation of regular settlements on the northern shores of this great British continent.

The Governor of South Australia, Sir R. MacDonnell, has already anticipated the establishment of a telegraphic communication across the continent, and this again will necessitate the occupation of stations on the north coast, by which the colony of Victoria, as well as that of South Australia, will have a much easier and more rapid communication with India than by the circuitous route of the eastern coast and the Torres Straits. And when this telegraphic communication from south to north is opened out across Australia,

may the first message transmitted by it be, “ Honour to MacDouall Stuart ! ” \*

Sir Roderick Murchison then addressed the Duke of Newcastle, Her Majesty’s Secretary for the Colonies, in these words :—

“ My Lord Duke,—As you have heard the reasons assigned for granting the Patron’s Medal of this Society to Mr. MacDouall Stuart, and are, of course, well aware of the merits of that explorer, I may say that I am right glad to see your Grace present on this occasion, notwithstanding the great pressure of official business which is, I know, thrown upon you this very day. Your attendance here is, indeed, the most pregnant proof of the lively interest you take in the vast colonies of Australia.

“ I am certain, therefore, that in transmitting the Victoria Medal, I hope by this evening’s mail, your Grace will much increase the honour by adding to it the sanction of your own approbation.

“ The President and Council are already deeply impressed with the conviction that you have on numerous occasions promoted the advancement of geographical science, by the communications you have sent from the Colonial Office, and I now have to thank you for taking this opportunity of testifying to the colonists of Australia, that you rejoice with the geographers of England in recognising the great and important services of Mr. MacDouall Stuart.”

The Duke of Newcastle replied that it had afforded him great pleasure to obey the invitation of the President, Lord Ashburton, and attend for the purpose of receiving the medal, for two reasons—first, because he was anxious to testify his entire concurrence in the objects of this important Society, of which he was a humble member, and secondly to express on behalf of the Imperial Government, and more especially of the department over which he had the honour to preside, their entire approval and sympathy in the labours and exertions of that persevering and enterprising explorer to whom that memorial had been awarded. Sir Roderick Murchison had alluded to the former exploits of Captain Sturt, the predecessor of Mr. Stuart in the field of Australian enterprise. He (the Duke of Newcastle) was sure there was no man who would feel less jealousy at the success of Mr. Stuart than that eminent individual. Mr. Stuart commenced his exploration under the auspices of Mr. Chambers, who provided funds for that purpose. He returned in August, 1859, from one of his expeditions, having reason to believe

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\* The bay at the mouth of the Victoria River is 15° south of the equator, and our countrymen, under Gregory (encampment of Mr. Wilson) were there for eight months, and enjoyed perfect health. If it be objected that Europeans will suffer too severely from the climate to carry on works on the coast of North Australia, it may be suggested, that the chief labourers may be Chinamen or Coolies, to work under English direction.

he should eventually succeed in the object he had in view. Starting again with fresh means and appliances, he ultimately succeeded in reaching a point 100 miles further north than that to which Mr. Gregory had penetrated, when he was stopped by the hostility of the natives. He had travelled a distance of 3000 miles, and undergone great hardships, having, for instance, on one occasion passed 101 hours without water, under a burning sun; and, although he had been driven back by the natives, he might fairly be considered to have accomplished the object he had at heart, which was to strike the north coast somewhere near Cambridge Gulf. It would be out of place at that moment to raise any controversy on such a subject, but as the Chairman had raised the question he must remark that the result of Mr. Stuart's exertions, and the anticipations they held out for the future, convinced him (the Duke of Newcastle) that the Government had for the present done right in not forcing colonization on the northern shores of Australia. He anticipated that those shores would now very soon become peopled, though there might be some difference of opinion as to the best means by which that could be done. The last account of Mr. Stuart was that he was about to start again, and the only circumstance which he (the Duke of Newcastle) regretted in connexion with the expedition, upon which by this time Mr. Stuart must have entered, was that he had gone alone, without scientific companions. But he anticipated that Mr. Stuart would be successful even without those companions, and he should have great pleasure in transmitting the Society's medal to him by the mail which would leave England that day, conscious as he was of the eminent services which that gentleman had rendered to geographical science, and to the colony and his country at large.

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*Reward for the best Reflecting Instrument.*—The Society, last year, recognizing the importance of reflecting instruments to geography, offered a reward of 50*l.* for the best instrument of that description. Representations have, however, been made that sufficient time was not allowed for proper competition: the Council have deferred the award for another season. In the mean time a sextant has been deposited in the Society's office by Messrs. Elliot, which, in addition to other improvements, comprises a stand of great portability.